



News Release

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Dangerous levels of Paralytic Shellfish Poison biotoxin found in many areas
Recreational shellfish harvest closures in effect for areas of central and south Puget Sound

OLYMPIA — Shellfish collected from a large area of central and south Puget Sound contain enough Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) biotoxin to make people sick. So, the Washington State Department of Health has closed recreational shellfish harvest in Jefferson, Island, Snohomish, Kitsap, King and Pierce Counties. Commercially harvested shellfish have been thoroughly tested and should be safe to eat.

Warning signs are posted at beaches used by recreational shellfish harvesters to warn people not to collect shellfish from the closed areas. The closures include clams, oysters, mussels, scallops, geoduck, and other species of molluscan shellfish. Crab is not included in the closure, but “crab butter” should not be eaten. The PSP toxin is produced by algae that are often more common during the warmest months of the year.

People can get very sick from eating shellfish contaminated with the toxin. Marine biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Symptoms of PSP can appear within minutes or hours and usually begin with tingling lips and tongue, moving to the hands and feet. This is followed by difficulty breathing, and potentially death. Anyone who has eaten shellfish and begins having these symptoms should get medical help immediately. A person can’t tell if PSP is present by looking at the water or shellfish. For this reason, the term “red tide,” which is often used for PSP, is misleading and inaccurate. PSP can only be detected by laboratory testing.

Before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington, people should check for updated closure information on our [Shellfish Safety Website](#) or call our Biotxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632. The [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*.

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